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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 006136

SIPDIS

PARIS FOR ZEYA, LONDON FOR TSOU

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SY](#) [HRC](#) [S](#)

SUBJECT: SPONTANEOUS DEMONSTRATION AT STATE SECURITY COURT;  
TRIAL OF HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST RASTANAWI BEGINS

Classified By: CDA Stephen Seche for reasons 1.4(b)/(d)

1. (C) COURT SCUFFLE RESULTS IN BRIEF DETENTION: SARG security forces detained approximately 12 men who had participated in a spontaneous demonstration in front of the State Security Court on November 13, following a hearing for approximately 13 men who have been held on Islamist charges for more than a year. According to human-rights lawyer Rezan Zeituni, who was present at the incident, an elderly family member of one of the detainees sat in front of the security transport truck returning the detainees to prison, refusing to move and shouting that he had not seen his son in over a year. Zeituni said that approximately 200 people present (mainly family members and civil society activists) began shouting "damn the system, down with the government, down with the President," and also called for the end of the exceptional courts and more freedom. Security officials began beating the protesters and detained 12 male protesters, including Mohammed Ali al-Abdullah, son of recently released Atassi Forum member Ali al-Abdullah, for about two hours at a local police station. Zeituni reported that one protester had been re-detained on November 14 by Air Force security officials.

2. (C) HUMAN-RIGHTS ACTIVIST APPEARS LAWYERLESS AT STATE SECURITY COURT: Human-rights activist Nizar Rastanawi from Hama appeared on November 20 at the State Security Court to face charges of disseminating false information to affect public morale. Rastanawi, who has been detained since April 19, appeared without a lawyer for most of his hearing, as Presiding Judge Faez al-Nouri banned defense lawyer Rezan Zeituni from the courtroom following her participation in the November 13 protest at the State Security Court. Fellow defense lawyer Khalil Maatouk left the courthouse in solidarity with Zeituni. Opposition figure and lawyer Hassan Abdulazim stepped in as defense counsel midway through the session, but presented no information on Rastanawi's behalf. During questioning by the presiding judge, Rastanawi made clear that he was not acquainted with the witnesses the prosecution had presented. Nouri asked Rastanawi if he met regularly with foreign embassy officials, which Rastanawi denied. The judge then called Rastanawi "one of the loiterers at the embassy gates." A British diplomat later told Poloff that this was the first time that he had witnessed this line of questioning in the presence of diplomats, leaving those present wondering if embassy contacts will be fair game for interrogation following Assad's November 10 speech. Rastanawi remains in SARG custody; his next court date is February 5, 2006.

SECHE